

COMMITTEE:  
ENERGY AND COMMERCE

SUBCOMMITTEES:  
COMMERCE, TRADE AND  
CONSUMER PROTECTION  
ENERGY AND AIR QUALITY  
COMMUNICATIONS,  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS,  
AND THE INTERNET



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June 10, 2010

The Honorable Jon Leibowitz  
Chairman  
Federal Trade Commission  
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Chairman Leibowitz:

I write to encourage you to discontinue the Federal Trade Commission's ('Commission') efforts to "reinvent" journalism. As an ardent believer in a free press and the free market of ideas, I am extremely concerned by the contents included within the so-called 'Federal Trade Commission Staff Discussion Draft – Potential Policy Recommendations To Support The Reinvention of Journalism.' In my opinion, government efforts to "reinvent" journalism by empowering bureaucrats in Washington and relying on a system where journalists are dependent on federal handouts rather than their ideas and entrepreneurialism runs counter to a free press.

Turning to the substance of the matter, I am perplexed as to where the 'Commission' finds the legal authority to undertake such a vast exercise. Could you please provide my office with the legal basis for this endeavor and the development of this discussion draft? Secondly, as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce, which has direct oversight of the 'Commission,' I would like to know how many staff hours were dedicated towards the development of this discussion draft? It seems to me that the American public would be better served if the 'Commission' would stick to its core mission of protecting consumers rather than becoming distracted with issues where it lacks the policy expertise and statutory authority to implement the recommendations included within the discussion draft.

Aside from these questions surrounding the legal authority of this 'Commission's' initiative, I am deeply disturbed by the recommendations surrounding taxation of services and the development of a "National News Fund." It is equally alarming to me that the 'Commission' fails to adequately recognize the serious conflicts of interest that arise when the federal government attaches itself to the financial health of a particular industry – especially journalism. And to suggest that postal subsidies, public legal notices, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, or even tax breaks to "maintain, establish or increase circulation" are analogous to direct funding is as ridiculous as the federal government's supposed ability to "rescue" journalism.

June 10, 2010

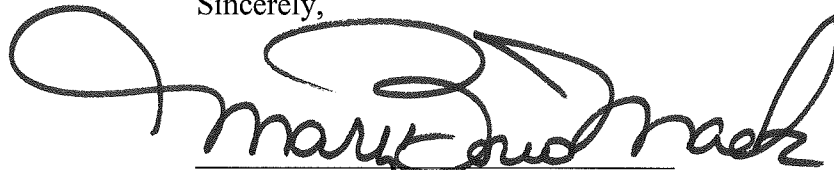
Furthermore, this discussion draft is clear proof that the federal government has grown too big and is completely disconnected from the needs of the American people. It is also evidence that American taxpayers are not respected by the federal government and that American tax dollars are not being spent responsibly. I would like to restate my objection to the 'Commission' moving any further with this endeavor. In closing, I would like to paraphrase the late liberal Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas who commented on another government intrusion into the media – the Fairness Doctrine:

*"The prospect of putting Government in a position of control over publishers is to me an appalling one, even to the extent of the Fairness Doctrine. The struggle for liberty has been a struggle against Government."*

These words remain true. I hope you will reconsider your endeavor.

I look forward to receiving answers to the questions raised in this letter, and I hope this endeavor is promptly terminated so the 'Commission' can get back to the business of working for the American consumer.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary Bono Mack". The signature is written over a horizontal line.

MARY BONO MACK  
Member of Congress